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EXCISE

PAGE 01 PHNOM 00278 191542Z

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ACTION EA-15

INFO OCT-01 EUR-20 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 CCO-00 CIAE-00
PM-05 H-02 INR-07 L-04 NSAE-00 NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Subby DATE 10/9/80
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 278

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

FOLLOWING IS OUR REVIEW CAMBODIAN SITUATION WITH PRELIMINARY
AND TENTATIVE ASSESSMENT:

1. "WITHDRAWAL OF CONFIDENCE" AS OF 1300 MARCH 18 FROM SIHANOUK
BY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CAUGHT ALL RPT ALL OBSERVERS BY SURPRISE.
WHILE SIGNS OF SIHANOUK-RKG DIFFERENCES HAD BEEN EVIDENT AND
REPORTED FOR LONG TIME, NO ONE FELT THAT FINAL STEP WOULD BE
TAKEN AT THIS TIME. RATHER, SOME FACESAVING COMPROMISE WAS
EXPECTED AND WE BELIEVE OFFERED TO SIHANOUK WHO REFUSED.

2. EARLY MARCH 18 ALL SIGNS POINTS TO A COUP D'ETAT. AIRPORT
CLOSED, COMMUNICATIONS WITH OUTSIDE WORLD CUT, SOME TROOPS AND
ARMS IN STRATEGIC PLACES THROUGHOUT PHNOM PENH, SECRET SESSIONS
RKG AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - BUT EVEN THEN SOME OBSERVERS UNABLE
BELIEVE ANYONE COULD PULL IT OFF.

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Department of State TELEGRAM

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PHNOM 00278 191542Z

3. AS OF THIS WRITING ALL OUTWARDLY CALM IN PHNOM PENH. QUESTION MARK APPEARS BE REACTION NVN, PRG, CHICOMS AND SOVIETS, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW SIHANOUK'S REPORTED DECLARATION RE FORMATION GOVERNMENT IN EXILE MOSCOW OR PEKING (IT INTERESTING NOTE HE DID NOT RPT NOT MENTION FRANCE IN THIS CONNECTION). RE SOVIET ATTITUDE IT APPEARS DIFFICULT SEE WHAT THEY COULD GAIN BY SUPPORTING SIHANOUK IF RKG HOLDS TOGETHER. AS FOR CHICOMS, THIS FAR LESS CERTAIN AND DECISION WILL BE IMPORTANT INDICATION THEIR FEELINGS TOWARD FURTHER COMMUNIST VIETNAMESE EXPANSION. NVN/VC REACTION MAY DEPEND ON CHICOM IN PART BUT MAY BE VIOLENT REACTION OR SIT PAT IN HOPES CAMBODIA WILL BE UNABLE PUSH THEM OUT AND SITUATION RETURN TO STATUS QUO ANTE.

4. TIMING - WE DO NOT BELIEVE TIMING WAS PLANNED IN ADVANCE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE SIHANOUK'S ABSENCE FROM CAMBODIA ALTHOUGH IS ABSENCE CLEARLY PLAYED INTO HANDS OF RKG ONCE DECISION MADE TO ACT.

5. WHY - WE BELIEVE REASONS BEHIND COUP BASICALLY THOSE OF LONGSTANDING POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN SIHANOUK AND RKG BROUGHT TO A HEAD THIS TIME OVER NVN/VC ISSUE AND THAT OF CORRUPTION. AS HAS BEEN STATED PREVIOUSLY, RKG WISHES PRINCE BECOME REALLY CONSTITUTIONAL CHIEF OF STATE.

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6. MOST RECENTLY WE UNDERSTAND THAT NVN/VC ISSUE RAISED WITH HIM IN PARIS AND THAT UPON RETURN PHNOM PENH LON NOL REPORTED SIHANOUK INTRANSIGENT AGAINST ANY CHANGE HIS FOREIGN POLICY (WHICH HE HAD PARTICULARLY RESERVED AS HIS FIELD) AND IMPOSSIBLE DEAL WITH. LATER, YEM SAMBAUR AND PRINCE NORODOM KANTOL WERE TO GO TO PARIS OR MOSCOW TALK WITH HIM BUT PRINCE REFUSED RECEIVE THEM. GENERALLY RELIABLE SOURCE REPORTS THAT DECISION MADE MOUNT CAMPAIGN WHICH LED TO MARCH 11 SACKING DESIGNED RISE PEOPLE TO PITCH AND TOPPLE SIHANOUK. PLOY FELL SHORT SO ASSEMBLY PRIMED ACT AGAINST SIHANOUK AND FAMILY. THIS TOO DELAYED BY ALLEGED THIRTY-FOURTY MILLION RIELS SPREAD BY CHICOMS BUT SCENARIO FINALLY COMPLETED MARCH 18. FINAL BREAKING POINTS REPORTEDLY WERE A) LAST TELEGRAM FROM MOSCOW ACCUSING "RIGHTISTS" IN SUCH VIOLENT FASHION THAT RKG REALIZED HOPELESS, TALK FURTHER AND B) ALLEGED CONFESSION BY GOVERNOR OF KANDAL TO QUEEN THAT HE HAD ACCEPTED 300,000 RIELS FROM VC

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Department of State TELEGRAM

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PHNOM 00278 191542Z

7. OTHER FACTORS WHICH MAY WILL HAVE FIGURED BUT NOT PRE-ponderantly in recent events are A: PERSONAL AMBITIONS ON PART SOME RKG MEMBERS, B) REALIZATION THAT NVN/VC NOT DOING WELL IN SVN, C) SIHANOUK TOO LONG IN POWER UNDER AN ARCHAIC SYSTEM BELONGING MORE TO FIFTEENTH CENTURY AND WHICH HE REFUSED CHANGE.

8. FUTURE OF SIHANOUK - WHILE MIRACLES DO HAPPEN, WE BELIEVE IT EXTREMELY UNLIKELY THAT SIHANOUK CAN RETURN TO POWER. NOT ONLY FOREIGN OBSERVERS BUT NUMBER OF CAMBODIANS HAVE VOICED SAME OPINION. IF HE DOES RETURN HE CAN ONLY DO SO AS COMMIE STOOGES WHICH WILL DISCREDIT HIM IN CAMBODIAN EYES AND BEFORE WORLD AND WILL DESTROY HIS USEFULNESS TO COMMUNISTS. HE COULD BECOME A SOUPHANOUVONG RPT SOUPHANOUVONG.

9. LOCAL REACTIONS - MOST OFFICIALS TALKED TO ARE APPARENTLY PLEASED THOUGH THERE ARE SOME WHO OPENLY REGRET SIHANOUK DEPARTURE. SOME SPEAK AS IF ALREADY DIVIDING UP THE PIE WITH TALK OF NAMING NEW AMBASSADORS, CLOSING NEWSPAPERS, ETC.

10. PEASANTRY, LIKE MOST PEASANTRY, REPORTED APATHETIC. BOTH ISRAEL AMB WHO DROVE SIEM REAP-PHNOM PENH AND US JOURNALIST WHO DROVE TO SVAY RIENG REPORT NO REACTION TO SIHANOUK OUSTER. WE SEE NONE IN PHNOM PENH, ALTHOUGH LOCAL POPULATION GENERALLY STAYED INDOORS LAST NIGHT TO LISTEN TO RADIO REPLAYING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE IN WHICH SIHANOUK'S "CRIMES" LISTED. ON OTHER HAND, RADIO REPORTS FURTHER SERIES SACKINGS AND ATTACKS ON VIETNAMESE, AND ALSO CHINESE FOR FIRST TIME, IN A NUMBER OF TOWNS THROUGHOUT CAMBODIA.

11. RUMORS - STORIES CIRCULATING THAT PHNOM PENH POLICE CHIEF AND TWO ASSISTANTS ARRESTED (THIS VERIFIED); THAT PRINCESS MONIQUE'S MOTHER HAS MANAGED FLEE CAMBODIA; THAT COLONELS OUM MENOURINE AND SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ UNDER HOUSE ARREST IN LON NOL'S HOUSE. GOVERNOR OF PHNOM PENH, SIHANOUK'S CHIEF CABINET, AND OTHERS HAVE DISAPPEARED.

12. PRESS AND RADIO - SOME PRESS OPENLY FOR RKG ALREADY BUT SOME PLAYING IT VERY CAUTIOUSLY WITH EDITORIAL ON ECON AFFAIRS INSTEAD OF CUSTOMARY POLITICAL PIECE. RADIO BEGINNING REPLAY ASSEMBLY'S ATTACKS ON PRINCE AND ENTOURAGE RE SELLING LAND

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Department of State TELEGRAM

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 PHNOM 00278 191542Z

TO VC, CORRUPTION, ETC.

13. DIPLOMATIC COLONY - SOMEWHAT STUNNED WITH MOST, BOTH EAST AND WEST, FAVORING WAIT AND SEE POLICY IN ORDER NOT ROCK BOAT WHICH MAY BE ABLE CONTINUE NEUTRAL COURSE. SOME SEE SWING TO RIGHT, CREDIT US EMBASSY FOR THIS AND RUMORS ALREADY CIRCULATING USG HAS BEEN ASKED FOR ASSISTANCE.

14. FUTURE - WE BELIEVE RKG DESIRES CONTINUE POLICY OF NEUTRALITY BUT MORE GENUINE ONE THAN FORMER WHICH ALLOWED NVN/VC DO PRETTY MUCH AS THEY PLEASED. WE DO NOT RPT NOT BELIEVE RKG CAN GET ALL NVN/VC OUT OF COUNTRY AND FEEL IT WOULD BE ERROR FOR IT TO TRY TOO HARD. POSSIBILITY ALSO EXISTS OF COURSE THAT HAVING GOTTEN RID OF SIHANOUK, NEW LEADERSHIP WILL REVERT TO HIS POLICY WITH NEW PAY-OFF ARRANGEMENTS. SOME TALK ALREADY HEARD OF ABOLISHING MONARCHY IN FAVOR OF A REPUBLIC.

15. US POLICY - WE SHOULD CONTINUE AS AT PRESENT. DO NOT RPT NOT FORESEE IMMEDIATE REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE BUT EVEN SHOULD IT COME, I ADVISE THAT IT BE DELAYED IN ORDER NOT FRIGHTEN OR PUSH COMMIES IN TO ACTION - AND THAT THIS BE DISCUSSED FRANKLY WITH RKG. EVENTUALLY, IF PRESENT REGIME SURVIVES, CONSIDERATION AID, APPOINTMENT AMBASSADOR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED. SITUATION STILL FLUID AND WE SHOULD NOT GET OUT FRONT SINCE ANYTHING USG DOES MAY WELL DRIVE CAMBODIAN TO OTHER CAMP. SAME OF COURSE HOLDS TRUE FOR CHICOMS, SOVIETS AND NVN/VC. QUESTION OF FORMAL RECOGNITION DOES NOT APPEAR AS CONCERNS US, BUT WOULD APPRECIATE INSTRUCTION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT ACKNOWLEDGE FONMIN NOTE NOTIFYING US OF SIAHANOUK OUSTER SINCE THIS TANTA- MOUNT RECOGNITION. WOULD SUGGEST US NOT BE FIRST.
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